

Scout Vehicle Designs Must Allow for Easy Dismount

Dear Sir:

...I recently read the January-February 1999 issue of *ARMOR* and was pleased to see the in-depth article on the Future Scout and Cavalry System (FSCS), and the very informed authors' concept of the future vehicle. Nothing catches the attention of a scout like the thought of new toys. At first glance, the authors' concept vehicle is a very attractive option. The sensors that can detect movement near and far, the ability to "lase" targets, the crew-less turret, the up-gunned weapon system, and the digital up-link are all very appealing to the eye. The purpose of this letter is not to argue for or against the authors' concept vehicle, but rather against a trend in future vehicle design: an inability to work in the real world. Bear with me.

The biggest thing that sticks out in my mind is that most vehicle designers don't take into account the fact that combat troops DISMOUNT a lot. A vehicle cannot climb a forested hillside that must be cleared. A mounted crew with its full sensor array can't HEAR anything. The high tech and very expensive sensors can't see around a bend in the road. And for all its incredible capabilities, it can't pull its own local security. Only a dismounted scout can trudge up a steep mountain with only the terrain and his own physical fitness to protect him. Only a dismounted scout can run up to a bend in a road and peek around it with little risk. Only a dismounted scout can detect the RPG-toting,

mud-covered guerrilla fighter slithering into his Tactical Assembly Area. Only a dismounted scout can keep non-combatants, refugees, and Civilians-on-the-Battlefield (COBs) away from his track and maintain situational awareness.... Scouts cannot effectively perform their mission without dismounting. Every concept vehicle I have ever seen does not adequately address the need to dismount. The Armored Engineer Vehicle (AEV) based on the M1 in the same issue of *ARMOR* is a fair example of this disregard. A clamshell door no wider than a couple feet is the point of entry and exit to a cramped little portion of the vehicle. Dragoons (infantrymen/cavalrymen whose purpose is to dismount) are an afterthought of the concept designers. And when they are thought of, it is usually to excess.

I look at this new vehicle and see a very capable and a very exciting reconnaissance platform, but I also see a flawed vehicle. There is no way a soldier can be expected to operate that vehicle, stop, open his hatch, get his gear on, jump down to the ground, and scout ahead. Doing that once would be a tiring process, much less the number of times such a procedure would be necessary on an actual mission. Every halt longer than a few minutes, every bend in the road, every forested treeline, and every time, this frustrating process would be necessary. And if a designer was told to do something about this, I don't doubt there would

be some very elaborate seats made, when all a dragoon wants for is a place to rest with his gear on, or at the very least, nearby and easily accessible.

Somebody once asked me what I thought the best scout vehicle would be (a common question these days among scouts). My reply was a Toyota truck with four well-equipped dragoons in back. By well-equipped, I mean with the most miniaturized ammo (e.g., PRC-127s for short range, or a SABER for longer), compact weaponry (M-4s), the best sights available (thermal rifle scope, PVS-7Ds), and being physically fit. While the Toyota truck is a little simplistic and not real survivable against an equal opponent, I believe my point is made. There isn't a vehicle or sensor in existence that can hope to replace the dismounted scout. It is my fervent hope that the designers of tomorrow's Army and the Army After Next take my enlisted perspective into account the next time they hit the drawing board. Lt. Col. Douglas Macgregor cautioned in his outstanding book, *Breaking the Phalanx*, the danger of our high-tech army having its laser rangefinder smashed by a rock. I hope his words are heeded and that the role of the dragoons, the dismounted scouts, is never forgotten and always included in any future designs.

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